

A MOBILE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION/COMPUTING DEVICE HAVING A
CONTEXT SENSITIVE AUDIO SYSTEM
RELATED APPLICATIONS

This non-provisional patent application claims priority to U.S. provisional
5 patent application no. 60/418,920, entitled "A MOBILE DIGITAL
COMMUNICATION/COMPUTING DEVICE HAVING A CONTEXT SENSITIVE
AUDIO SYSTEM", filed on October 15, 2002 and having common inventorship
with the present application, which is hereby fully incorporated by reference.

FIELD OF INVENTION

10 The present invention relates to the fields of mobile communication and/or
computing devices. More specifically, the present invention relates to delivery of
audio on these devices.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

15 Advances in computer and telecommunication technology have led to wide
spread adoption of mobile client devices, from the basic wireless telephones to
function rich notebook sized computers that pack the power of a desktop
computer. In between are web enabled wireless telephones, palm sized personal
digital assistants (PDA) and so forth. As a result, multi-media contents are also
becoming available and consumed through mobile client devices.

20 These multi-media contents include but are not limited to, movies, music,
and so forth. An important aspect of utilization of multi-media contents is audio.
For example, a mobile client device may include a multi-media resource such as
an MP3 player or a radio (where rendering of the audio content often
accompanied by displays of titles, stations, graphics and other visualizations of
25 the like).

Utilization of multi-media resources such as MP3 player/radio requires
utilization of the mobile client device's audio system, which is often a resource
shared by many functions of the mobile client device. These audio system
sharing functions include but are not limited to functions for delivering message
30 alerts for the arrival of an incoming call, a text message and so forth. Thus,

utilization of the audio system by the multi-media resources may cause interference and/or conflict with other resources/functions of the mobile client device.

For example, in the case of the mobile client device being a cell phone having multi-media resource capabilities, such as the MP3 player/radio, the playing of the music may interfere with the delivery of a message alert for an incoming call and vice versa. That is, the alert tone may be generated at a predetermined power level that was pre-selected by a user. However, when the MP3 player is being utilized, the pre-selected power level of the alert tone may be either too low or too high relative to the music being played, thereby causing either the alert tone being too low to be heard over the music or too high that it causes intrusive interference with the enjoyment of the music. What is worse is if the message alert is set to be delivered at a high volume to ensure that the user can hear it even in a noisy environment, and the user is employing a headset to enjoy the audio content. Delivery of the message alert at the preset high volume level may cause damage to the user's eardrum.

Among the modern mobile client devices, unquestionably, wireless mobile and palm sized computing devices have emerged as the two most popular mobile client devices to utilize these multi-media resources. Thus, a need exists for a more context sensitive way of notifying a user of an alert tone while an audio system is being utilized by multi-media resources.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

The present invention will be described by way of exemplary embodiments, but not limitations, illustrated in the accompanying drawings in which like references denote similar elements, and in which:

FIGURE 1 illustrates an overview of the present invention, in the context of an exemplary audio system, in accordance with one embodiment;

FIGURE 2 illustrates an architectural view of a mobile client device, which is representative of mobile phone, incorporating teachings of the present invention;

FIGURES 3A-3B illustrate the operational flow of the relevant aspects of second audio resource, an example of which may be a ring tone generator, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention; and

FIGURES 4A-4B illustrate exemplary applications of an audio system incorporated with the teachings of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

In the following description, various aspects of the present invention will be described by way of illustrative embodiments. However, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art other embodiments may be practiced with only some of the aspects. For purposes of explanation, specific numbers, materials, and configurations are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding. However, it will also be apparent to one skilled in the art that other embodiments may be practiced without the specific details. In other instances, well known features are omitted or simplified in order not to obscure the illustrative embodiments.

Parts of the description will be presented using terms such as audio, alert, volume, and so forth, commonly employed by those skilled in the art to convey the substance of their work to others skilled in the art. Parts of the description will be presented in terms of operations performed by a computing device, using terms such as sensing, generating, mixing, and so forth. As well understood by those skilled in the art, these quantities and operations take the form of electrical, magnetic, or optical signals capable of being stored, transferred, combined, and otherwise manipulated through mechanical and electrical components of the "host" mobile device.

Various operations will be described in turn in a manner that is most helpful in understanding the present invention, however, the order of description should not be construed as to imply that these operations are necessarily order dependent. Furthermore, the phrase "in one embodiment" will be used repeatedly, however the phrase does not necessarily refer to the same embodiment, although it may. The terms "comprising", "having", "including" are synonymous, unless the context requires otherwise.

FIGURE 1 illustrates an overview of the present invention, in the context of an exemplary audio system, in accordance with one embodiment. Exemplary audio system **100** may be a component of a mobile client device, for example, a wireless mobile phone. As shown, audio system **100** receives electronic signals from various signal processing and control facilities of the mobile client device, and processes the received electronic signals appropriately, including responsively generating audio signals and mixing them, before providing them to the speakers.

As illustrated in **FIG. 1**, for the embodiment, exemplary audio system **100** includes a first audio resource **102** that receives/retrieves audio content **104**, and generates a first audio signal **106** at a first audio volume. For example, first audio resource **102** may read audio content from a non-volatile memory **206** (shown in **FIG. 2**) in the case of an MP3 player, or receive audio content from an antenna **412 & 428** in the case of a radio, and generates music in response. Audio content controls **108** such as title/track of music, radio station, audio volume, and so forth, may also be received by the first audio resource **102** facilitating desired utilization of the audio resource by a user (not shown). That is, the user may have set the audio volume level of the audio signal associated with the MP3 player to a user desired audio volume level, and accordingly, first audio resource **102** provides the first audio signal **106** associated with the utilization of the MP3 at the user desired first audio volume level.

In **FIG. 1**, audio system **100** also includes a second audio resource **110** that likewise, receives a delivery of a message alert **112**, and generates a second audio signal **114** for the message alert at a second audio volume. For example, second audio resource **110** receives a delivery of a message alert for an incoming call **112**, and generates a second audio signal **114** in the form of a ring tone. System controls **116** such as various ring tones, audio volume increments, audio volume, and so forth, may also be received by the second audio resource **110** from the non-volatile memory **206** (shown in **FIG. 2**), and the generation of the ring tone is controlled accordingly.

Additionally, in **FIG. 1**, the audio system **100** includes a mixer **118** to receive the first and second audio signals **106 & 114** to be mixed and provided to

speakers **122** in the form of a mixed audio signal **120**. Speakers **122** responsively render mixed audio signal **120** as sound for the user.

Additionally, as shown in **FIG. 1**, in accordance with one aspect of the present invention, the second audio resource **110** advantageously further
5 controls its audio volume based at least in part on the current state of mixed audio signal **120**. In one embodiment, second audio resource **110** is equipped to determine a first audio volume level at which the mobile client device is being utilized by the user for the first audio signal **106** (i.e., the volume mixed audio signal **120**), and then, provide the second audio signal **114** at a second audio
10 volume level to the user. The second audio volume level is based at least in part on the first audio volume of the first audio signal **106**.

Referring to the previous example of the MP3 player and the incoming call, in accordance with one aspect of the present invention, second audio resource **110** provides a ring tone associated with an alert for the incoming call **112** at an
15 audio volume level that is based at least in part on the audio volume level at which the MP3 player is being played. Having a second audio signal **114** at a volume level based at least in part on a first volume level of a first audio signal **106** advantageously provides for a more context sensitive way of notifying a user of an alert tone while an audio system is being utilized for multi-media resources,
20 thereby avoiding poor usability problems such as ringing at a too low volume level or ringing at a too high volume level into the user's ears.

Before proceeding to further describe other aspects of the present invention, it should be noted while for ease of explanation, the remaining descriptions are presented primarily in the context mobile client devices,
25 however, based on the description to follow, a person skilled in the art will appreciate that the present invention may be adapted for other applications besides mobile client devices.

Additionally, for ease of understanding, audio signals are presented in terms of music and ring tones. However, based on the description to follow, it
30 should be appreciated that the audio signals may be in any number of forms, e.g., music and voice (including but not limited to intercom functionality that may

be found in some mobile client devices). Accordingly, the present invention will not be redundantly re-described for all the various available audio signals.

Audio resources **102 & 110**, and mixer **118** may be implemented in software and/or hardware. For example, if audio resources **102 & 110** are implemented as software, while having mixer **118** implemented as hardware, an audio signal device driver and a digital to analogue converter (DAC) (both not shown) may be disposed between the audio resources **102 & 110** and mixer **118**. Similarly, if mixer **118** is implemented as software, an audio device driver and a DAC may be disposed between mixer **118** and speakers **122**. Inclusion of audio signal devices and DACs for various implementations of the present invention are within the ability of those skilled in the art, accordingly, will not be described in further details.

Continuing to refer to **FIG. 1**, in various embodiments, second audio resource **110** is equipped to cause the second audio signal **114** to be delivered at a second audio volume level that is substantially the same as the first audio volume level of the first audio signal **106** at which the mobile client device is being utilized. Moreover, second audio resource **110** is equipped to cause the second audio signal **114** to be at a second audio volume that advantageously provides for a more context sensitive way of notifying a user of an alert tone while an audio system is being utilized for multi/single-media resources.

In various embodiments, second audio resource **110** is equipped to variably control the second audio volume level of the second audio signal **106**. That is, for these embodiments, starting from an audio volume level based at least in part on the first audio volume level of the first audio signal **106**, the second audio volume level is gradually increased in predetermined increments to eventually reach an upper limit of an audio volume level. Preferably, the predetermined increments may be system dependent based on the type of mobile client device, to be more fully described below. Alternatively, the predetermined increments are configurable by the user. As previously described, system controls **116** may include the predetermined increments.

In various embodiments, second audio resource **110** is equipped to determine audio volume levels as audio power levels, such as, but not limited to, audio power levels measured in at least one of volts, watts, and decibels.

5 In various embodiments, second audio resource **110** is equipped to determine if audio signals are being utilized in the mobile client device, and to provide a second audio signal at a second audio volume if the audio signals are being utilized.

10 In various embodiments, second audio resource **110** is equipped to compare the second audio volume level of the second audio signal **114** with the first audio volume level of the first audio signal **106** before being providing the second audio signal **114** at the second audio volume.

Audio resources **102 & 110** may generate any one of a number of audio signal utilized in audio systems that receive electrical signal and generates corresponding audio signals having frequencies within the audio range which
15 may be between 15-20000 Hz (i.e., audio signals). Additionally, audio resources **102 & 110** may include any one of a number of audio volume controllers utilized to boost the power level of an audio signal to drive a speaker, such as, an amplifier (i.e., for various audio volume levels).

20 Mixer **118** may be any one of a number of audio signal mixers utilized in audio systems to mix various audio signals. Mixers are well within the ability of those skilled in the art, accordingly, will not be described in further details.

25 Except for second audio resource **110** being equipped to facilitate a more context sensitive way of notifying a user of an alert tone while an audio system is being utilized for multi/single-media resources, the functions and constitutions of the various enumerated components of **FIG. 1** are known in the art, accordingly will not be otherwise further described. Additionally, for ease of understanding the present invention, various components that may also be included in the audio system **100**, such as, but not limited to, pre-amplifiers, differential amplifiers, and so forth, are not shown.

30 **FIGURE 2** illustrates an architectural view of a mobile client device **200**, which is intended to be representative of mobile phone **400** and PDA **420** (shown in **FIGS. 4A & 4B**), incorporating teachings of the present invention. As

illustrated, mobile client device **200** includes elements found in conventional mobile client devices, such as micro-controller/processor **202**, digital signal processor (DSP) **204**, non-volatile memory **206**, general purpose input/output (GPIO) interface **208**, and transmit/receive (TX/RX) **210**. For the illustrated
5 embodiment, mobile client device **200** is also advantageously provided with audio system **212** (representative of earlier described audio system **100** shown in **FIG. 1**) having mixer **214** and speakers **216** (representative of earlier mixer **118** and speakers **122** both shown in **FIG. 1**).

In the illustrated embodiment of **FIG. 2**, a first audio resource may be an
10 MP3 player. Accordingly, in **FIG. 2**, non-volatile memory **206** includes instructions in the form of an MP3 player **218** to be executed by the micro-controller or processor **202**. Utilization of the MP3 player **218** provides a first audio signal in the form of music at a first audio volume level. Additionally, mobile client device **200** may also include a radio **220** that provides the audio
15 signal. That is, mobile client device **200** may have one or more multi-media resources. Utilization of multi-media resources **220** & **218** are well within the ability of those skilled in the art, accordingly, it is not further described.

In **FIG. 2**, TX/RX **210** includes a second audio resource in the form of a ring tone generator **222** to receive a delivery of a message alert, and in response,
20 generates a ring tone. Accordingly, ring tone generator **222** provides a second audio signal in the form of a ring tone at a second audio volume level. In accordance with the teachings of the present invention, ring tone generator **222** is equipped to provide the second audio signal at a second audio volume level that is based at least in part on the first audio volume level of the first audio signal.

25 As a result, a second audio signal is advantageously provided to the user in a context sensitive manner, while multi/single-media resource(s) of the mobile client device is/are being utilized for a different audio signal.

FIGURES 3A-3B illustrate the operational flow of the relevant aspects of second audio resource **110** (shown in **FIG. 1**) an example of which may be the
30 ring tone generator **222** (shown in **FIG. 2**), in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. As previously alluded to, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, based on the description to follow, in practice, second audio

resource **110** may be implemented in hardware, e.g., through ASIC, or in software, executed e.g., by an embedded controller.

As illustrated in **FIG. 3A**, on initialization, e.g., upon receiving a delivery of a message alert **112**, second audio resource **110** determines the first audio volume level at which a wireless mobile phone is being utilized by a user for a first audio signal, block **302**. In various embodiments, the first audio signal is associated with music, e.g., an MP3 player, a radio, and so forth. Accordingly, for at least some of these embodiments, second audio resource **110** determines the first audio volume level at which music is being played by the wireless mobile phone.

Thereafter, second audio resource **110** provides the second audio signal at a second audio volume level to the user, block **304**. The second audio volume level is based at least in part on the first audio volume level. In various embodiments, the second audio signal is associated with ring tones for system alerts, e.g., an incoming call. Accordingly, for at least some of these embodiments, second audio resource **110** provides a ring tone to the user at an audio volume level that is based at least in part on the audio volume level that the music is being played.

Referring now to **FIG. 3B**, one embodiment for providing a second audio signal to the user at a second audio volume level is described in more detail. As previously described, in various embodiments, the second audio volume level may be substantially identical to the first audio volume level, block **306**. That is, for the embodiment described, the ring tone is provided to the user at an audio volume level that is substantially same as the audio volume level of the music being played.

In various embodiments, the second audio volume level is gradually increased in predetermined increments to an upper limit audio volume level. Accordingly, for at least these embodiments, second audio resource **110** determines whether the provided second audio signal is responded to by the user, block **308**. The user may respond to the second audio signal in any one of a variety of manners, e.g., by pressing a button to receive the incoming call. If it is determined that the user has responded to the second audio signal, the

response is handled in an application dependent manner (i.e., answer the incoming call), at 310. Preferably, once the user responds to the second audio signal, the second audio resource 110 turns off the first audio signal so as not to interfere with the application associated with the second audio signal.

5 If the user does not respond to the second audio signal, second audio resource 110 determines if an upper limit of the audio volume level has been reached, block 312. The upper limit of the audio volume may be based at least in part on a mobile phone's maximum volume level, e.g., a volume level of "10". If the upper limit of the audio volume level has been reached, second audio
10 resource 110 continues to provide the second audio signal at the upper limit of the audio volume level until the user does respond to the second audio signal or until other disposition criteria, such as the mobile client device responding with a no answer message, are met, at 314.

 Back at block 310, if it is determined that the upper limit of the audio
15 volume has not been reached, second audio resource 110 increases the second audio volume level of the second audio signal to by an increment, at block 316. Here again, the increment, by which the second audio volume level is increased, may be based at least in part on a particular mobile phone's system corresponding to incremental audio volume changes, e.g., the incremental audio
20 volume increase for a change in the audio volume of the mobile phone from "1-2", "2-3", and so forth. Accordingly, for example, if the second audio volume level is 2 corresponding to the first audio volume level, the incremental audio volume increase may be 1 audio volume level resulting in the subsequent audio volume level being 3. This process is continued until the upper limit of the audio volume
25 level is reached (i.e., audio volume level of 10).

 As a result, a second audio signal is advantageously provided to a user in a context sensitive manner, while multi/single-media resource(s) of the mobile client device is/are being utilized by the user. Additionally, an audio volume level of the second audio signal is incrementally increased to facilitate a response from
30 the user.

 For ease of understanding the present invention, audio volume level is described in terms of alphanumeric variables. However, it should be appreciated

that the audio volume level may be described in terms of any number of manners, such as, but not limited to, graphical representations of watts, decibels, and so forth.

FIGURES 4A-4B illustrate exemplary application of audio system **100 & 212** of **FIGS. 1 & 2** incorporated with the teachings of the present invention. Illustrated in **FIG. 4A** is a wireless mobile phone **400** incorporated with audio system **100 & 212** of **FIGS. 1 & 2**, which as described earlier, is equipped to provide an alert in a more context sensitive manner, in accordance with the teachings of the present invention.

As illustrated in **FIG. 4A**, similar to conventional wireless mobile phones, wireless mobile phone **400** includes key pad **402**, "talk" and "end talk" buttons **404**, cursor control buttons **406**, display screen **408**, speaker **410**, and antenna **412**. Additionally, wireless mobile phone **400** may include multi-media resources, e.g., MP3 player and radio that may be listened to by a user through speaker **410** or headphones (not shown). However, unlike prior art wireless mobile phones, wireless mobile phone **400** is provided with audio volume control logic **106 & 220** to advantageously provide various audio signals in a less intrusive manner, while these multi-media resources are being utilized.

Referring now to **FIG. 4B**, a palm sized PDA, incorporated with the teachings of the present invention, in accordance with various embodiments, is shown. As illustrated, similar to a conventional PDA, PDA **420** includes display screen **422**, function buttons **424**, speaker **426**, and antenna **428**. Similar to the wireless mobile phone **400**, PDA **420** also may include multi-media resources, e.g., MP3 player and radio that may also be listened to by a user through speaker **426** or headphones (not shown). However, unlike prior art PDA, but similar to wireless mobile phone **400**, PDA **420** is provided with second audio resource **110** that is equipped to advantageously provide various audio signals in a more context sensitive manner, while these multi-media resources are being utilized.

Accordingly, a mobile client device having integrated capabilities for providing various audio signals in a more context sensitive manner, while these multi-media resources are being utilized has been described. While the present invention has been described in terms of the above illustrated embodiments,

those skilled in the art will recognize that the invention is not limited to the embodiments described. Thus, the description is to be regarded as illustrative instead of restrictive on the present invention.